

## SEXUAL ASSAULT PROTOCOL GRIFFIN JUDICIAL CIRCUIT, 2024

This Griffin Judicial Circuit, Sexual Assault Protocol (“Protocol”) is adopted pursuant to O.C.G.A § 15-24-2 for the purpose of outlining the procedures to be used in responding to, investigating and prosecuting cases of sexual assault. The purpose of this Protocol shall be to ensure coordination and cooperation between all agencies involved in sexual assault cases so as to increase the efficiency of all agencies handling such cases and to minimize the stress created for the alleged sexual assault victim by the legal and investigatory process<sup>1</sup>.

*The mission of the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) is to develop a protocol to be used by health care providers, including hospitals, all branches of law enforcement, including prosecution, and programs which assist victims. An emphasis in this protocol is upon letting a victim regain control over decisions by letting that victim choose whichever services are needed.*

For purposes of this Protocol, the term **victim** shall refer to victims age 18 and older. Every sexual assault case involving victims under 18 shall refer to the Griffin Judicial Circuit, Child Abuse Protocol in identifying appropriate services and resources. Per the state model Child Abuse protocol, those services and resources should include the Southern Crescent Sexual Assault and Child Advocacy Center in providing services to adolescents in acute cases. An agreement between the Southern Crescent Sexual Assault Center and Children’s Advocacy Center shall define access to and sharing of client records. In providing services to anyone under the age of 18, DFACS and/or law enforcement shall be notified pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 19-7-5.

### ADVOCACY

The role of the sexual assault victim advocate<sup>2</sup> is to provide services to the victims of sexual assault regardless of whether or not the victim chooses to participate in the criminal justice process. They play a very important role in providing a

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<sup>1</sup> O.C.G.A. § 15-24-2; provided, however that a failure by an agency to follow the protocol shall not constitute an affirmative or other defense to prosecution of a sexual assault, preclude the admissibility of evidence, nor shall a failure by an agency to follow the protocol give rise to a civil cause of action.

<sup>2</sup> Defined as a trained sexual assault victim advocate working with a Georgia certified sexual assault center

response that keeps the victim central in the process, allowing the investigation and prosecution to be offender focused. Advocacy also has a critical role in promoting the healing process for the victim. Sexual assault victim advocates provide crisis intervention, support, family advocacy, information and referral and other ancillary services to assist the victim through the criminal justice process. The support provided by the sexual assault victim advocate also benefits the criminal justice process, because supported, well-informed victims are more likely to continue through the process. Advocates will operate under the guidelines established by *The Georgia Crime Victim's Bill of Rights* (O.C.G.A. § 17-17-1) and will adhere to best practices as outlined in the *Georgia Sexual Assault Response Team Guide* and the *Georgia Sexual Assault Certification Standards*.

Responsibilities of the sexual assault victim advocate include:

- Being available to victims and families 24 hours a day, 7 days a week via a 24-hour crisis line staffed by trained community advocates
- Providing services to victims and families that are sensitive to the unique barriers and special considerations that diverse victims encounter in reporting sexual assault crimes
- Providing options to victims so that they may make informed decisions
- Supporting victims who choose to report to law enforcement by providing a link to eliminate barriers effecting the victim's participation in the criminal justice process
- Maintaining victim confidentiality
- Offering services to non-reporting victims and assisting if and when the victim decides to report

Victims may also work with systems-based victim advocates if the case progresses through the criminal justice system to the point of prosecution.

## **LAW ENFORCEMENT**

The role of the investigating officer is to ensure the safety of the victim and the community and to ascertain if the report of sexual assault meets the elements of a crime under Georgia law. Within their jurisdictions, law enforcement will investigate sexual assault crimes. Investigative responsibilities include:

- Identification, apprehension and interrogation of suspect(s)

- Interview of victim with an offender focused and trauma informed approach, which includes allowing an advocate to be present
- Interview of witnesses
- Collection and preservation of evidence
- Maintenance of chain of custody
- Utilization of Georgia State Sexual Assault Kit Tracking System
- Timely submitting sexual assault evidence collection kits to GBI crime laboratory regardless of whether a suspect has been identified, per GBI recommendations
- Review of GBI Crime lab reports as soon as possible after they are released to investigating agency, per GBI recommendations
- Determination of probable cause and arrest
- Preparation of case reports with investigative summaries
- Assistance to District Attorney's office in prosecution of case
- Testimony and presentation of evidence in court

Investigating officers will work with victim advocates to ensure a victim centered response to the investigation and proper notification of case updates to victims. Additionally, law enforcement officers will operate under the guidelines established by *The Georgia Crime Victim's Bill of Rights* (O.C.G.A. § 15-17-1) and adhere to best practices as outlined in the *Georgia Sexual Assault Team Guide*.

As per O.C.G.A. 17-5-71 and O.C.G.A. 17-5-72, a victim shall have a right to a sexual assault kit regardless of their participation in the criminal justice process. The advocate will coordinate the sexual assault exam with the victim during the intake process. Law enforcement for the jurisdiction of the sexual assault will respond to the designated office and wait to receive the kit for storage as defined by law. Each law enforcement agency may create a report as defined by their agency policy in order to maintain for the time period defined by law.

## **MEDICAL FORENSIC EXAMINATION PROCEDURES**

The role of the medical forensic personnel is to provide a timely, high-quality medical forensic examination that can potentially validate and address sexual assault patients' concerns, minimize the trauma they may experience, and promote their healing. At the same time, it can increase the likelihood that evidence collected will



aid in criminal case investigation, resulting in perpetrators being held accountable and further sexual violence prevented.

Medical forensic examinations shall be performed at Southern Crescent Sexual Assault and Child Advocacy Center. Medical forensic exams should be made available if a patient chooses to report, chooses not to report, or chooses to report anonymously.

Medical forensic examinations shall be performed by a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (“SANE”), physician, nurse practitioner or physician’s assistant (“PA”) trained in performing such exams.

Medical forensic responsibilities include:

- Obtaining informed consent from the patient for the medical forensic examination, documentation, and evidence collection
- Gathering the medical forensic history
- Conducting a physical examination
- Coordinating treatment of injuries
- Documentation of biologic and physical findings
- Collection of evidence from the patient
- Documentation of findings
- Utilization of Georgia State Sexual Assault Kit Tracking System
- Providing information, treatment, and referrals for STIs, pregnancy
- Follow-up as needed for additional treatment and/or collection of evidence.
- Providing testimony at trial

## **BIOLOGIC EVIDENCE COLLECTION**

The SANE, physician, nurse practitioner or PA will collect biologic samples at the request of a patient, in accordance with currently accepted protocol (defined as the *National Protocol for Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Examinations Adults/Adolescents*), to obtain timely biologic reference samples for possible analysis at the GBI Crime Lab. At the conclusion of the sexual assault medical forensic examination, any evidence collected will be packaged and protected in a manner to ensure the integrity of specimens and the appropriate chain of custody of the evidence.



All biologic evidence from the patient's body will be collected up to a minimum of 120 hours after assault. In addition, cases should be evaluated on an individual basis as the medical forensic examination may be completed beyond 120 hours.

All biologic samples, fluids, hairs, and other evidence requiring GBI analysis will be given directly to the case investigator for processing using a proper chain of evidence.

Pursuant to SB 304/O.C.G.A. § 35-1-2, it shall be the duty of every law enforcement officer who takes possession of the evidence collected during a sexual assault forensic medical examination to ensure that such evidence is submitted to the division within 30 days of it being collected.

Urine and/or blood collected for analysis can be collected up to 120 hours and may be submitted to the Georgia Bureau of Investigations Crime Lab, the Federal Bureau of Investigations Crime Lab or other private lab for toxicology drug screen.

All biologic evidence collected at the request of a patient who chooses not to initiate and participate in and/or cooperate with a law enforcement investigation shall be maintained by chain of custody according to jurisdiction in which the crime occurred. As per O.C.G.A. 17-5-71 and O.C.G.A. 17-5-72, a victim shall have a right to a sexual assault kit regardless of their participation in the criminal justice process. The advocate will coordinate the sexual assault exam with the victim during the intake process. Law enforcement for the jurisdiction of the sexual assault will respond to the designated office and wait to receive the kit for storage as defined by law. Each law enforcement agency may create a report as defined by their agency policy in order to maintain for the time period defined by law.

## **SEXUAL ASSAULT KIT TRACKING SYSTEM**

Per <https://svrga.org/what-sakts>: In support of Georgia State House Bill 255, also known as The Sexual Assault Reform Act of 2021, a **sexual assault kit tracking system (SAKTS)** has been developed for the state through a partnership between the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI). The reform act requires all medical facilities, state, county and city agencies, and persons that handle, process or store sexual assault kits (SAKs) to be registered users of the system by June 30, 2022.

Sexual assault kits are used in forensic medical exams conducted by over 200 medical agencies in Georgia. More than 600 law enforcement agencies are involved in the transfer, retention, and storage of kits, and the GBI has multiple locations that forensically analyze the kits.

The goal of SAKTS implementation is aimed at preventing sexual assault kit backlogs and will also allow survivors to track the status of their kit as it moves through the criminal justice system.

**Types of agencies that will utilize SAKTS include:**

- Hospitals
- Sexual Assault Centers
- Law Enforcement Agencies
- Child Advocacy Centers
- GBI Crime Labs
- Prisons / Jails
- Medical Examiners' Offices
- Universities
- Military Bases

<https://svrga.org/what-sakts>, CJCC

**REQUESTS FOR MEDICAL FORENSIC EXAMINATION**

With the consent of the patient, medical forensic examinations can be performed at the request of (1) a law enforcement agency, (2) the District Attorney's Office, (3) the medical examiner or coroner's office, (4) a hospital, (5) pursuant to a court order, **or at the patient's request pursuant to O.C.G.A. 17-5-72.**

Medical forensic examinations may be requested 24 hours a day by using the following procedure:

**Southern Crescent Sexual Assault and Child Advocacy Center**  
**24 Hour Crisis line: 770/477-2177**

If a Sexual Assault has been reported to law enforcement (within 120 hours of assault), a forensic medical exam may be performed at the Southern Crescent

Sexual Assault and Child Advocacy Center by a SANE. We are available 24 hours/7days a week to perform exams for ALL ages.

\*\*\*For acute cases involving children under 12 (Reported within 120 hours) or delayed disclosure (>120 hours) for ages 0-17, please call the crisis line (770-477-2177) to speak with an Advocate to discuss what is best for the client\*\*\*

1. Patrol Officer/Deputy/Investigator contacts SCSAC-CAC via the 24 Hour Crisis Line at 770-477-2177. You will either be patched through to the Advocate or they will call you back within 15 minutes.

2. Patrol Officer/Investigator relays the following information to SCSAC-CAC's Advocate, if possible:

- Name of officer and/or investigator assigned to case
- Name of law enforcement agency, to confirm jurisdiction
- Case number
- Gender and age of victim
- Special needs of victim (i.e. language barriers, disabilities, etc.)
- Time period since assault occurred
- Location of Victim.
- Advocate will need to speak with the victim
- Estimated Time of Arrival at designated SCSAC-CAC Facility
- Special needs/requests of investigator (i.e. to interview survivor prior to exam, etc.)

3. If victim goes to the emergency department first, they should be medically cleared by ED staff and then released to go to the SCSAC-CAC facility for the sexual assault exam. In the event that the victim is not medically cleared and requires a hospital stay, hospital personnel will notify SCSAC-CAC to arrange for a sexual assault kit to be completed at the hospital.

4. If necessary, the patrol officer/deputy/investigator transports sexual assault victim to exam location.



5. At the SCSAC-CAC office, the patrol officer/deputy/investigator will remain in the building until exam and interview are completed. If the patrol officer/deputy/investigator cannot be at the office for the duration of the exam, a relief officer must be present for security purposes.

6. Law Enforcement receives all evidence (sexual assault kit, clothing, etc.) directly from SANE or SCSAC-CAC staff.

7. Please contact SCSAC-CAC at 770/507-7772 to arrange for pick-up of medical records.

### **COSTS OF THE MEDICAL FORENSIC EXAMINATIONS**

The cost of examinations shall be paid pursuant to O.C.G.A § 16-6-1(c), O.C.G.A § 17-5-72. Patients shall not be responsible for the payment of medical forensic examination costs.

### **CONDUCT OF THE MEDICAL FORENSIC EXAMINATION**

A SANE, physician, nurse practitioner or PA will perform the examination and assessment.

Medical forensic examinations and biologic evidence collection should be completed as quickly as possible after a report is received.

Medical forensic examinations and biologic evidence collection shall be conducted in accordance with Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) procedures using a GBI Sexual Assault Evidence Kit. It is also recommended that medical forensic exams be conducted in accordance with the *National Protocol for Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Examinations*.

A trained victim advocate will be available to accompany the patient and offer emotional support during the examination. The advocate will at no time ask the patient questions related to the details of the assault.

The SANE, physician, nurse practitioner or PA will complete appropriate authorizations relating to the examination.

The SANE, physician, nurse practitioner or PA will photograph and document injuries and prepare a report.

The SANE, physician, nurse practitioner or PA will maintain and document the chain of custody of any evidence collected during the examination and assessment.

The SANE, physician, nurse practitioner or PA will adhere to best practices as outlined in the *Georgia Sexual Assault Response Team Guide*.

## **PROCEDURES for HOSPITALS RECEIVING WALK-IN REPORTS OF SEXUAL ASSAULTS**

Hospitals receiving patients reporting incidents of sexual assault shall immediately contact law enforcement in accordance with O.C.G.A. § 31-7-9 mandating all non-accidental injuries be reported. Patients will retain the right not to initiate, participate in, and/or cooperate with any law enforcement investigation of such assault.

Hospital personnel shall timely notify Southern Crescent Sexual Assault and Child Advocacy Center of the incident including which law enforcement agency is responding.

## **PROSECUTION**

The role of the District Attorney's office is to protect the rights of the victim while holding the offender accountable. Prosecutors should work in a collaborative fashion with law enforcement, medical forensic and victim advocates. Prosecutors will operate under the guidelines established by *The Georgia Crime Victim's Bill of Rights* (O.C.G.A. § 15-17-1) that state, for example, that victims have the right,

- To be treated fairly and with dignity by all criminal justice agencies involved in the case
- To proceedings free from unreasonable delay
- To reasonable, accurate and timely notice of any court proceeding where the release of the accused will be considered
- To reasonable, accurate and timely notice of court proceedings or any changes to such proceedings, including restitution hearings

- To reasonable, accurate and timely notice of the accused's release and/or monitoring program
- To be present at all criminal proceedings in which the accused has a right to be present
- To NOT be excluded from any scheduled court proceedings, except as provided in O.C.G.A. § 17-17-1 or otherwise provided by law
- To a waiting area, during judicial proceedings, that is separate from the accused and his or her relatives, friends and witnesses
- To be reasonably heard at any scheduled court proceedings involving the release, plea or sentencing of the accused
- To complete a Victim Impact Statement and have it presented to the court prior to the trial or plea of the accused (O.C.G.A. § 17-10-11)
- To refuse to submit to an interview by the accused, accused's attorney or agent of the accused.
- To a requirement by the court that defense counsel not disclose victim information to the accused (O.C.G.A. § 17-17-10)

If a victim attends any court proceeding, a victim advocate from the District Attorney's Office will accompany the victim.

Prosecutors and prosecution-based advocates will adhere to best practices as outlined in the *Georgia Sexual Assault Response Team Guide*.

### **LOCAL SART COORDINATED RESPONSE**

All members of the Griffin Judicial Circuit Sexual Assault Response Team will adhere to best practices as outlined in the *Georgia Sexual Assault Response Team Guide*.

Members of the SART agree to meet annually for case review, discussion and evaluation to assure the coordination and cooperation between all agencies responding to sexual assault cases in the Griffin Judicial District.



*Pursuant to O.C.G.A § 15-24-2, members of the Griffin Judicial Circuit Sexual Assault Protocol Committee agree to meet annually to review, update and evaluate this Sexual Assault Protocol.*

The foregoing Sexual Assault Protocol is hereby adopted and replaces any previously adopted protocol and remains in effect until such time as said protocol is amended and adopted.

This 2nd day of February, 2024.

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W. Fletcher Sams  
Chief Judge, Griffin Judicial Circuit

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District Attorney, Griffin Judicial Circuit

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Ms. Gayle Nobles  
Executive Dir., Southern Crescent

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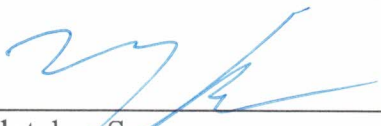
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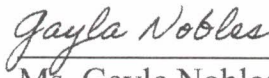
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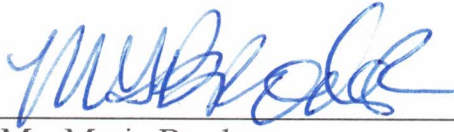
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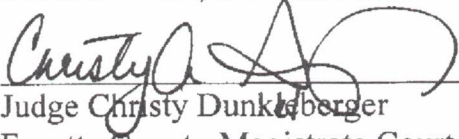
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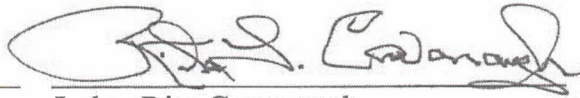
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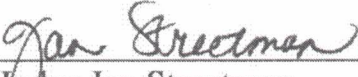
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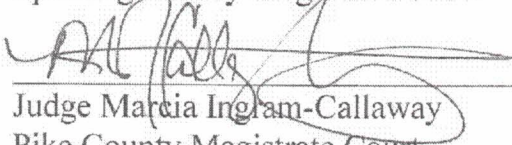
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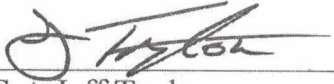
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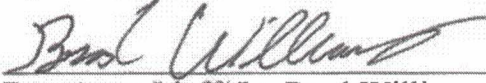
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Fayette County Sheriff's Office

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Spalding County Sheriff's Office

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Sgt. Jeff Taylor  
Upson County Sheriff's Office

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Pike County Sheriff's Office

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Det. Anna Lieff/ Lt. Brad Williams  
Peachtree City Police Department

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Griffin Police Department

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*Monica Snipes*  
Thomaston Police Department

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Zebulon Police Department

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Nurse Manager, Fayette County

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Nurse Manager, Spalding County

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Nurse Manager, Upson County

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Nurse Manager, Pike County

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W. Fletcher Sams  
Chief Judge, Griffin Judicial Circuit

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Ms. Marie Broder  
District Attorney, Griffin Judicial Circuit

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Ms. Gayle Nobles  
Executive Dir., Southern Crescent

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Private Citizen, Griffin Judicial Circuit

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Judge Christy Dunkleberger  
Fayette County Magistrate Court

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Judge Rita Cavanaugh  
Spalding County Magistrate Court

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Judge Jan Streetman  
Upson County Magistrate Court

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Judge Marcia Ingram-Callaway  
Pike County Magistrate Court

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Lucy Harris, Dn, BSN  
Nurse Manager, Spalding County

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Nurse Manager, Upson County

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Nurse Manager, Pike County



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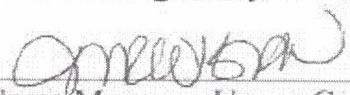
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Nurse Manager, Fayette County

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Nurse Manager, Spalding County

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Nurse Manager, Upson County

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Nurse Manager, Pike County